



## **Russian River Biological Opinion Update – November 2011**

The Sonoma County Water Agency is continually planning and implementing the Russian River Biological Opinion requirements. To better communicate the progress and timeline of this work, the Water Agency has provided the below outline of project updates. For more detailed information about these activities, please visit [www.sonomacountywater.org](http://www.sonomacountywater.org).

### **Dry Creek Demonstration Project**

- The Dry Creek Demonstration Project reached the 90% design level at the end of October. Discussions with landowners regarding access and construction are ongoing, and permitting requests to regulatory agencies will be made this fall and winter.
- The Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration environmental document and right-of-way process on the demonstration project will be reviewed by the Water Agency Board of Directors on November 15.

### **Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Study & Bypass Pipeline Study**

- After receiving no comments from regulatory agencies, contractors and others, the Dry Creek bypass pipeline was finalized in October.
- The Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement draft feasibility study will be finalized when official comments from NMFS are addressed.
- The Water Agency, National Marine Fisheries Service, Department of Fish & Game and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are working with consultants, ESSA, to develop clear success measures for habitat enhancement. The plan should be completed in 2012.

### **Tributary Fish Passage and Habitat Enhancement Projects**

- Construction on the Crane Creek and Willow Creek Fish Passage Enhancement Projects were completed in October. Crane Creek is a tributary to Dry Creek located near the one-mile Demonstration Project. Willow Creek flows directly into the estuary near Bridgehaven. The Crane Creek project involved creating and enhancing pools to give steelhead and coho greater access to spawning habitat. The Willow Creek project involved replacing several plugged/collapsed side-by-side culverts with a bridge.
- Wild juvenile coho were found in both Crane and Willow Creeks during surveys this past summer.
- Low numbers of wild juvenile coho were also found in Dry Creek during Water Agency summer surveys. Fish monitoring activities are wrapping up for the season.

### **Wohler Pond Modification Project**

- The project – which decommissioned infiltration ponds near Wohler Bridge – was completed in September. Historically, when flooding occurred in the area, the ponds would trap fish when the water receded. The purpose of the project was to remove any impediments so that future fish entrapment will not occur.

### **Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement**

- The Water Agency received a \$255,000 California Department of Fish and Game Fishery Restoration Grant for design of the project. Consultant (HDR Engineering) is working on the 30% design, which should be received in November.

### **Russian River Estuary Management Project**

- The Estuary Management Project final Environmental Impact Report was certified in August and the Board of Directors approved the project. On September 16, a lawsuit was filed by the Russian River Watershed Protection Committee challenging the EIR.
- 2011 fish monitoring activities took place throughout the summer, including the fyke net placed in the estuary, rotary screw traps installed at the mouths of three creeks that drain into the estuary and invertebrate monitoring and seining. Monitoring was completed for the season in mid-October.
- Water quality and seal (and other pinniped) monitoring is ongoing.
- The estuary remained open during the 2011 lagoon management period (May 15 – October 15).

### **Fish Flow Project**

Work is occurring internally on the preparation of the draft Environmental Impact Report for the Fish Habitat Flows and Water Rights Project.

- EIR Schedule
  - Release Draft EIR in summer 2012
  - Release Final EIR in summer 2013
  - BO requires Board to certify Final EIR by September 24, 2013
  - EIR will be prepared by Water Agency staff, with assistance from consultants on some areas of impact analysis.

### **Interim Flow Changes**

- On June 1, the State Water Resources Control Board issued an order in response to the Water Agency's petition to modify minimum instream flow requirements for this summer. Similar to the 2010 order, the 2011 order requires weekly fisheries reports, water quality monitoring and for the contractors to require their irrigation customers to "achieve a maximum applied water allowance of 60 percent ETo." The order ended on October 15, 2011.
- Chinook redd and pool surveys are being conducted weekly, per the TUC. Chinook are also being counted as they pass through the video monitoring stations at the Mirabel inflatable dam. As of November 1, 2,536 Chinook, 33 steelhead and 20-40 adult coho were counted.
- Reports for the 2011 TUC will be submitted to the State Water Board by March 31, 2012.

### **Public Outreach**

- The Dry Creek Valley Association is posting on its website a "Frequently Asked Questions" column regarding habitat enhancement.
- Monthly advertisements are being placed in community papers updating residents on the biological opinion.
- Board Chairman Efren Carrillo published a Close to Home regarding the estuary in The Press Democrat in October.